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ABSTRACT

This paper reviewed the current state of research literature on factors affecting utilization of university counseling services by Asian American students. The study was divided into two parts: one examined literature that focused exclusively on Asian American college students; the other explored Asian American utilization by examining studies conducted on the general population. The study found a pattern of under-utilization by Asian American students at both college and community levels. One factor contributing to this problem is a lack of culturally sensitive services. Additionally, when Asian Americans do seek assistance, the types of problems they present are often quite different from those of Euro-Americans. For example, achieving academic and vocational success is often a primary focus for Asian Americans, whereas Euro-Americans are more likely to seek help for depression and loneliness. A surprise finding of the literature is that acculturation level is not a reliable predictor of utilization. The presence of ethnically or linguistically matched therapists and the establishment of ethnic-specific services were found to have the greatest impact on increasing utilization. (Contains 23 references.) (RH)

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ASIAN AMERICAN UTILIZATION OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES: A REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH

A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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by

Thomas T. Chen

August, 1999

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ASIAN AMERICAN UTILIZATION OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES: A REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

ASIAN AMERICAN UTILIZATION OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES: A REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH

by

Thomas T. Chen

The goal of this paper was to review the current state of research literature on factors affecting utilization of university counseling services by Asian American students. Overall findings reveal a pattern of under-utilization by this population on college as well as community levels. Lack of competent, culturally-sensitive services continues to contribute to low usage rates. Asian American students' frequent presentation of academic and vocational concerns in addition to relational struggles often resulted in under-diagnosis and lack of treatment. Acculturation level was not a reliable predictor of utilization intent. The presence of ethnic/linguistic matched therapists and the establishment of ethnic specific services were found to have the greatest impact on increasing utilization. Recruitment of ethnically diverse counseling staff is strongly encouraged as well as development of culture-specific programming.

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ASIAN AMERICAN UTILIZATION OF UNIVERSITY COUNSELING SERVICES: A REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Introduction

It has been over two decades since the ground-breaking studies on Asian American utilization rates of Counseling Center services (Sue & Sue, 1974; Sue & Kirk, 1975). What gains has the field of psychology made in the ensuing years? What new knowledge have emerged in the treatment of the fastest growing group of college students? The current literature review will attempt to shed some light onto empirical findings on utilization issues in the current literature.

Asian Americans are the fastest growing group in the United States. In the 1980's their numbers grew at a rate of 108%, surpassing all other minority groups (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1992). Demographers project that by the year 2050 Asians in America will constitute 10% of the U.S. population, approaching numbers between 50 and 60 million (Sue, 1994). In institutions of higher learning the growth rate is even more astonishing. In some colleges and universities, Asian-Americans already make up the majority of the student body, surpassing even Caucasian populations. In order for university counseling centers to respond effectively to the needs of Asian American students, research into the issues confronting these students is needed. Information about the

problems and help-seeking preferences of Asian American students will allow for the development of culturally responsive treatment programs (Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly, 1994).

This present review will focus on current literature dealing with issues of utilization by Asian American college students. An examination of empirical research published this decade will provide a clearer picture of what has been learned about issues affecting utilization. Issues such as the effects of prior counseling experience on utilization, ethnic and language match between counselors and their clients, levels of acculturation, and reasons for seeking help will be explored in both the college population as well as at community and national levels.

Methodological Considerations

Research in the field of Asian American utilization of mental health services is constrained by many factors. The foremost is the absence of opportunities to study individuals' help-seeking behaviors while in the mist of personal difficulties. Only two realistic options exist for researchers of utilization patterns. One, sample non-clinical groups through the use of self report questionnaires regarding possible intent to seek services if difficulties arise in the future (Abe & Zane, 1990; Atkinson, Whiteley & Gim, 1990; Akutsu, Lin, & Zane, 1990; Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991; Gim, Atkinson, & Whiteley, 1990; Lippincott & Mierzwa, 1995; Narikiyo & Kameoka, 1992; Solberg et al., 1994; Suan & Tyler, 1990; Tata & Leong, 1994; Tracy, Leong, & Glidden, 1986). Two, search existing

records of clients who have sought assistance and attempt to derive their reasons for seeking services (Constantine, Chen, & Ceesay, 1997; Flaskerud & Liu, 1991; Lee & Mixson, 1995; Lin, 1994; Matsuoka, Breaux, & Ryujin, 1997; Sue, Fujino, Hu, Takeuch, & Zane, 1991; Takeuchi, Sue, & Yeh, 1995; Ying & Hu, 1992). Neither method provides a direct perspective on the decision making process an Asian American individual may undergo in deciding whether or not to seek professional counsel while faced with personal struggles.

Definition of Terms

Before proceeding further it is necessary to clarify some of the terms utilized in this literature review, such as Asian Americans, University Counseling Center, Current Literature, and Utilization.

Asian Americans. Definitions of Asian Americans in the research literature are inconsistent. The majority of studies neglect to differentiate between the various Asian American groups. Some studies merely report the number of subjects from each Asian group but treat them as a whole statistically (Abe & Zane, 1990; Atkinson et al., 1990; Constantine et al., 1997; Flaskerud & Liu, 1991; Gim et al., 1991; Gim et al., 1990; Lee & Mixson, 1995; Lippincott & Mierzwa, 1995; Matsuoka et al., 1997; Sue et al., 1991; Takeuchi et al., 1995). Two studies also included Pacific Islanders in their definition of Asian Americans (Takeuchi et al., 1995; Matsuoka et al., 1997). Some studies specifically focus on certain Asian groups. Tata and Leong (1994), Lin (1994), and Akutsu et al. (1990) concentrated on Chinese Americans. Narikiyo and Kameoka (1992) and Suan and Tyler (1990) examined Japanese Americans. One study defines Asian

Americans based on United States' citizenship status (Solberg et al., 1994). Only two studies (Tracy et al., 1986; Ying & Hu, 1994) explore between group differences among the various Asian American cultures. As a result of the variability of definition in the research literature, Asian Americans as referred to in this review will denote individuals of Asian descent residing in the United States, inclusive of various ethnic origins, citizenship status, and level of acculturation.

There are strengths and limitations associated with this literature based definition. The benefit of deriving a definition from the studies themselves allows for greater generalization across studies. The greatest limitation is the assumed homogeneity between various Asian American groups. Tracey et al. (1986) present a helpful reminder regarding between-group differences.

> When Asian Americans meet together, they meet not as a collective, but separately as Chinese Americans or Japanese Americans. Analyzing all Asian Americans together neglects important self-identified differences among the various Asian cultures. (Tracey et al., 1986, p. 332)

Utilizing a more inclusive definition of Asian Americans ignores both inter-group and intra-group differences, compromising the generalizibility of the study. Unfortunately, current state of research literature will not allow for more specific definitions.

University Counseling Center. The use of this term in this study includes all campus entities that provide psychological counseling to the student body within a College or University setting.

Utilization. Utilization signifies either actual treatment or stated intent to seek psychological counseling services.

Current Literature. Only empirical research articles published in professional journals between 1990 to present are included in this literature review.

Research Instrumentation

Research into ethnic groups is often limited by the lack of well established measures. Studies into Asian Americans are faced with similar shortcomings. Most psychometrically pristine instruments are neither designed for nor normed on Asian Americans. As a result, researchers must utilize instruments developed on Caucasian populations or rely on self-created measures and surveys.

Three studies (Atkinson et al., 1990; Gim et al., 1990; Tata & Leong, 1994) utilize the Suinn-Lew Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA), one of the few instruments developed specifically for Asian Americans.

Sample Populations

The manner in which samples are chosen for research greatly affects the ability to generalize findings. Common sampling difficulties include the lack of random sampling, absence of a control groups, small sample size, low response rates, and lack of random assignment to groups.

In addition to the usual limitations with sampling, research into Asian Americans is fraught with difficulties resulting from the heterogeneity of various Asian groups. The majority of the literature does not differentiate between the Asian American groups or make attempts to achieve representative numbers

from each group. Thus some of the samples may be composed mostly of individuals from one or two Asian American groups whereas other groups are not represented.

Lack of equal gender representation is also a common limitation. Only one study (Narikiyo & Kameoka, 1992) included equal numbers of men and women in each of the study groups.

Archival Samples. In utilizing archival records of any counseling center, results are often skewed by the selection criteria of the given center. Most centers possess written or unwritten policies which define what issues warrant treatment. Individuals who present difficulties that do not fit selection criteria are denied treatment or referred to other services. In many centers only students presenting with personal or interpersonal struggles are offered treatment. Students who present with overt academic, vocational, or somatic concerns are not offered treatment and diverted to other student services, such as Academic Advising, Career Counseling, or Health Centers.

This practice is necessary in differentiating between those who will benefit from counseling services, and those who may be better served else where. The practice is effective when individuals from various backgrounds have similar presentations of personal struggles. Problems arise when groups manifest similar difficulties in disparate ways. For example, if a Asian American student struggling with depression presents with academic concerns, instead of feelings of isolation and sadness, he or she may not receive counseling services. The end

result is that only Asian Americans who fit the center's definition of needing counseling will be accepted for treatment and represented in the research data.

Another limitation of archival data arises from treatment outcomes. When examining outcomes, the data are limited by the sensitivity of outcome measures as well as inter-rater reliability. When measures are not applied uniformly across all cases, any attempt at generalizing findings will be difficult.

Research Literature

This current review will focus on research into two populations of Asian Americans. The first part of the review will examine research that focuses exclusively on Asian American college students. Attention will be given to various utilization factors including the following: stated reasons for seeking help (Akutsu et al., 1990; Constantine et al., 1997; Lee & Mixson, 1995; Lippincott & Mierzwa , 1995; Narikiyo & Kameoka, 1992; Suan & Tyler, 1990; Tata & Leong, 1994; Tracey et al., 1986); the effect of various acculturation levels (Atkinson et al., 1990; Gim et al., 1991; Gim et al., 1990; Tata & Leong, 1994); and the interaction of ethnic and/or language match between counselors and clients (Abe & Zane, 1990; Akutsu et al., 1990; Gim et al., 1991).

To better understand any group of students, one must examine the communities from which these students emerge. The second part of this paper will explore Asian American utilization issues on a grander scale by looking at several studies conducted on the general population. The focus will be on local and national utilization rates (Matsuoka et al., 1997; Ying & Hu, 1994; Zhang,

Snowden, & Sue, 1998), the effects of ethnicity and/or language match between counselors and clients (Lin, 1994; Flaskerud & Lin, 1991; Sue et al., 1991), and possible benefits of ethnically specific programs (Sue et al., 1991; Takeuchi et al., 1995).

College Findings

Early research in mental health utilization rates indicated that as a group Asian American students were seeking services at a significantly lower rate than their Caucasian counterparts (Sue & Kirk, 1975; Sue & Sue, 1974). Current literature indicates little has changed in the past 25 years.

Contrary to the belief that Asian Americans are psychologically healthier "model minorities," under-utilization does not indicate a lesser need. Asian Americans have shown higher than normal levels of disturbance (Tracey et al., 1986). Asian Americans appear to have as many needs and concerns as others, but they are less well served by existing counseling practices and thus end up making less use of counseling (Lee & Mixson, 1995). Cultural variables also play a role in utilization rates. The desire to protect the family reputation or "saving face" may lead Asians Americans to look first to families or friends for help (Tracey et al., 1986).

Counselor Credibility. In their survey of counseling center clients, Lee and Mixson (1995) report that Asian students rated their counselors significantly lower in competence, were less favorable toward returning to their counselors, and rated the effectiveness of counseling lower for personal-social-emotional concerns than did Caucasians. Even when matched for demographic variables

and presenting concerns, Asian students still rated their counselors to be less competent. The researchers suggest that findings may be due to Asian students' tendency to view counseling as a more directive process in which they often expect the counselor to be an experienced expert providing advice and information, as well as empathy and nurturance. Lee and Mixson (1995) also report that although Asians checked about the same number of concerns, they had significantly fewer sessions than did the Caucasian students. The researchers discovered that Asian students availed themselves of a wider number of student services on campus, suggesting that students may be seeking more culturally acceptable assistance from other campus sources in lieu of counseling center services.

The major strength of this study arises from utilization of two samples matched on demographic variables (age, sex, & class standing) and presenting concerns. Another strength was that the samples consisted of actual counseling center clients. Data were collected from individuals with first-hand counseling experience, not hypothetical responses from students who may not have an understanding of counseling. Sampling of actual clients also resulted in the greatest limitation of this study. Because all the respondents had sought services from a particular counseling center, there was no information on perceptions of counseling from individuals with personal-social-emotional struggles who chose not to seek treatment from the center. It is possible that the findings are reflective only of that center's level of competence in working with Asian American issues and not Asian American attitudes about counseling as a whole.

In their study on predictors of utilization intent, Akutsu et al. (1990) compare groups of Chinese and Caucasian students. The researchers report that achieving counselor credibility in the initial therapy sessions is essential for the continuation of mental health services for Chinese students. Akutsu et al. (1990) suggest that counselor credibility was directly related to empathic involvement . The authors state, "It appears that one of the more effective ways to establish credibility is to provide immediate benefits by focusing the initial sessions on the most current and practical concerns of the client" (p. 451). Contrary to popular notion, a directive counseling style was not a predictor of either utilization intent or counselor credibility if the counselor was perceived as confrontational. This study proposed that, in working with Chinese clients, it is essential for the counselor to present himself or herself as a creditable source of assistance from the onset of therapy. Credibility is gained through accurate empathy and providing immediate relief from presenting struggles. Thus, the ability of the therapist to communicate competence significantly affects utilization intent.

Limitations of Akutsu et al. (1990) arise from two areas, subject group and stimulus material. The Asian sample in their study consisted of Taiwanese national students in Taiwan. Given the lack of exposure to the field of Psychology in Asian countries, it is likely that subjects did not have accurate understanding of the counseling process.

The stimulus material used in the study consisted of transcript presentations of counseling sessions translated to Chinese. It may be very

difficult for subjects unfamiliar with the counseling process to gain a complete grasp of the therapy sessions based solely on transcript material.

Presenting Problems. A major reason for low utilization rates of mental health service by Asian American students lies in the presenting problems. Personal, emotional, and social struggles in Asian American students manifest themselves differently. When mental health providers are unaware of the cultural differences in presenting issues, Asian students' concerns may be misdiagnosed and go untreated. Help-seeking behaviors for Asian Americans are different from those of Euro Americans. The problems each group perceives as appropriate for counseling and the variables related to these problems are different (Tracey et al., 1986). Asian American students are more prone to focus on the academic arena. Asian American students appear to feel more comfortable dealing with academic and vocational issues than with personal or emotional issues (Solberg et al., 1994; Tracey et al., 1986). Although Asian American students may seek treatment for academic or vocational concerns, it is possible that these areas may have been affected by personal or emotional distress (Constantine et al.,1997). It is likely that Asian American students seek treatment regarding academic and vocational issues out of reluctance to admit personal or emotional difficulties. In working with Euro American students it is often important to distinguish between academic/career and personal/emotional concerns. This distinction may not be valid with Asian students. Tracey et al. (1986) believe that if Asian American students manifest their emotional problems primarily through academic/vocational concerns, or

are unwilling to present personal concerns, this distinction may lead to misdiagnosis and insufficient treatment.

Although academic/vocational concerns are often presented, they may not be the most frequently presented issues. In their study of intake concerns, Constantine et. al. (1997) report that relationship difficulties with family members was the most frequent presenting problem for Asian American students. Academic problems and depression tied for the second most common struggles.

Two studies offered conflicting results on the issue of somatization. Lippincott and Mierzwa, (1995) state that, when seeking help, Asian students tend to present somatic complaints in place of psychological complaints. Narikiyo and Kameoka, (1992) report that Japanese American students were less likely to associate mental illness with organic or somatic struggles.

Lippincott and Merizwa, (1995) found that Asians as a whole, tended to present physical, rather than emotional, "symptoms" because it is more culturally appropriate. They argued that it is important for college student service providers and other health care providers to be alert to Asian students who present physical complaints as a means of seeking relief from underlying depression or other emotional conflicts.

On the other hand, Narikiyo and Kameoka (1992) report that Japanese Americans are less likely to endorse physical causes of mental illness or associate it with organic or somatic factors. Instead, Japanese Americans rate "problems with other people" as a more likely cause of mental illness.

Attribution theory may help to explain the difference in problem presentation between Asian American students and their Euro American counterparts. Simply stated, when stressed, people will seek help in the areas that are most valued or salient for them and not in low-priority issues. For Asian American students, achieving academic and vocational success is the primary focus of higher education. Tracey et. al. (1986) propose that when Asian Americans and Euro Americans are placed under identical conditions of stress, each will focus on different problems. Given a similar situation in which a student has few friends, is lonely, and is not doing well academically, the Asian American student is more likely to express academic/vocational concerns as important, whereas the Euro American student would more likely seek help for his or her depression and loneliness.

Given this difference in attribution, university counseling centers need to change their role within the university setting to address issues faced by Asian American student populations (Solberg et. al., 1994). Asian American students may avail themselves to more of counseling center services if academic/career concerns are addressed by therapists. To increase Asian Americans' usage of psychological services, counseling centers should advertise their efforts in helping students with academic concerns, while indirectly dealing with emotional/ developmental issues (Tracey et. al., 1986). Lee and Mixson (1995) propose that counselors need to learn to work skillfully with Asian American students' personal issues while focusing on more apparent academic or career problems.

Tracey et. al. (1986) examine the presenting concerns of 3,050 students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa student development center. Major strengths of this study are the large clinical sample group along with differentiation between various Asian American Groups. Tracey et al. (1986) compare the presenting concern of various Asian American groups , Chinese American, Filipino American, Hawaiian, Korean American, Japanese American, Asian-European, and Asian-Asian mix. The researchers found that while Euro American students disproportionately over-endorse interpersonal and intrapersonal concerns, Asian American students mostly under-endorse those issues. On the other hand, Asian Americans seem to over-endorse academic/career concerns.

Although their final analysis did not reveal major between-group differences, Tracey et al. (1986) are to be commended for treating Asian Americans as heterogeneous groups. The authors find that the presenting concerns of Filipino American and Asian-European mixed students appeare to fall between the extremes of Euro American students' concerns and the concerns of the other Asian American groups.

An area of possible weakness of this study lies with the presenting problems questionnaire filled out by the sample students. Of the eight questions, only two address interpersonal/ intrapersonal issues, whereas the rest deal with academic/career concerns. Wording on the intrapersonal question ("have difficulty with close personal relationships, don't get along with others") may have been culturally biased. In Asian cultures where social harmony is highly

valued and conflict is shunned, it may be more difficult for individuals to admit that they "don't get along with others." This may result in under-endorsement of intrapersonal concerns. Another limitation is in the generalizability of data derived from Asian American students in the ethnically diverse State of Hawaii to the rest of the United States.

Constantine et al. (1997) examine intake concerns more closely, classifying presenting concerns into 48 mental health categories. They report that Asian Americans rank five presenting issues most frequently: Family Relationships, Academic Concerns, Depression, Romantic Issues, and Stress Management. The authors provid support for the importance of academic issues to Asian American students, as well as demonstrate the significance of personal (depression & stress) and interpersonal (family & romance) presenting concerns . Family Relationships was found to be the most frequent presenting concern. Depression and Academic Concerns were the second most frequent. Two of the top three concerns were personal/ interpersonal issues. Although Asian Americans may frequently present academic and vocational struggles, similar to Euro Americans, relationship issues appear to be the most salient.

A study by Lippincott and Mierzwa (1995) on propensity of seeking counseling services, finds that Asian students are more likely than Euro American students to seek counseling services when they experience somatic discomfort. On a measure of somatization, Asian students scored significantly higher than Caucasian students. The authors urge student service providers to

be alert to Asian students presenting physical complaints as a means of seeking relief from underlying depression or other emotional conflict.

There are several shortcomings of this study. The sample group is relatively small (n=20), consisting of individuals from several Asian and Indo-Asian cultures. The questionnaire, Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), is distributed in English only, which may have caused difficulties with some individuals in the study. The BSI is normed using a predominantly Euro American sample, thus limiting its applicability to non-Euro American populations. Given these limitations, generalizations to the broader population of Asian Americans is questionable.

Narikiyo and Kameoka's (1992) study on help seeking attitudes among Japanese American students reports that, contrary to past findings, students are just as likely as their Euro American counterparts to attribute the cause of mental illness to interpersonal difficulties. The study also finds that Japanese Americans are more likely than Euro Americans to attribute mental illness to intrapersonal struggles such as "keeping problems to self" and "weak mindedness." The authors find no support for tendencies to somaticize psychological problems by Japanese American students. Euro American subjects actually endorsed physical causes of mental illness at a significantly higher rate than did Japanese Americans, as well as, the usefulness of physical types of help such as exercise, changing one's diet or consulting a herbalist.

Japanese American students are more likely to endorse family, friends and self as sources of help. Both groups rate various mental health professionals as

probably or very likely helpful. When actual usage of mental health services is examined, significantly more Euro American students are found to utilize services. In addition, significantly more Euro American subjects knew of family or friends who have received mental health services. Although both groups attribute mental illness to relational issues and viewed counseling as helpful, Japanese Americans do not seek services on par with Euro Americans.

The strength of this study rests with the subject groups. The researchers utilize a matched sample group of 288 students,144 Japanese American and 144 Euro Americans, with equal numbers of men and women. Unlike the majority of research on Asian Americans, Narikiyo and Kameoka (1992) concentrate particularly on Japanese American students, helping to contribute to the growing body of literature on specific Asian American groups.

The Japanese American sample result in limitations to this study. It is likely that findings of this study may only reflect the level of acculturation in the sample population. The majority (84%) of the Japanese American students in this study were either third or fourth generation Americans in Hawaii. Thus, less acculturated Asian Americans may posses different views about the causation of mental illness.

Acculturation. Research into the effects of acculturation on mental health utilization rates have yielded conflicting results. Some report that increased acculturation levels were related to positive attitudes toward seeking help (Tata, & Leong, 1994). Others find that increased acculturation levels resulted in lowered utilization intent (Atkinson et al. 1990). Gim et al. (1990) state that

whereas some acculturation increased utilization, high levels of acculturation actually hindered willingness to seek treatment. Lee and Mixson (1995) believe that differences between Asian American and Euro American students will not disappear as a function of time in the United States. Abe and Zane (1990) contend that cultural factors will continue to play a role in utilization even in the third and fourth generations.

Tata and Leong (1994) looked at how acculturation, gender, and social-network orientation affect attitude toward seeking professional psychological help among Midwestern Chinese American students. They report that students with higher levels of acculturation had more positive attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. Women in general had more positive attitudes about help-seeking than men. Preference for social contact also play a role: Chinese American students who were more favorable toward making friends and establishing support systems, tend to view seeking professional assistance more favorably. It appears that acculturation, gender and extroversion all contribute to higher utilization.

Limitations of this study arise from the under-representation of subjects from the low acculturation group (16.4%) as well as subjects from the highly (12.3%) acculturated group. With 71.3% of subjects in medium-acculturation category, findings may not reflect the attitudes of low and more highly acculturated subjects. It is unknown whether Midwestern Chinese American students are representative of students in other parts of the country.

Atkinson et al. (1990) survey 816 Asian American students on the effects of acculturation and utilization. The authors report that Asian-identified (low acculturation) students rate counselors/psychologists as a source of help higher than Western-identified (high acculturation) students. The most acculturated respondents gave the highest ratings to mother and friends as sources of help whereas the least acculturated students gave mother and friends the lowest ratings. As acculturation level increased, ratings of counselor/psychologist as sources of help decreased. The authors conclude that contrary to earlier findings, the values of more traditional Asian Americans do not seem to be antithetical to seeing a counselor for help with personal problems.

The strength of this study stems from the large sample size (n=816) and the use of an acculturation scale designed and normed on Asian Americans (Suinn-Lew Self-Identity Acculturation scale [SL-ASIA]).

Gim et al. (1990) further examine this sample group on the relationship between acculturation, severity of concerns and willingness to see a counselor. The researchers find that acculturation and ethnicity were related to the severity of concerns experienced by Asian Americans. Southeast Asian Americans, the least acculturated group, gave the highest problem severity rating across all concerns. Whereas Japanese Americans, the most acculturated group, gave the lowest ratings. The authors were quick to warn against over-generalizing these findings, given that many Southeast Asian Americans experienced the traumas of war and refugee camps prior to their immigration to the United States.

Overall, Gim et al. (1990) report an inverse relation between acculturation and willingness to see a counselor. It appears that individuals who score low to medium on the acculturation scale were more willing than those who score higher to seek the services of a counselor for their difficulties.

In their study on psychological maladjustment among Asian and Euro American students, Abe and Zane (1990) find differences between foreign-born and U.S.–born Asian American students. The researchers report that, after controlling for confounding factors such as personality style, response style, social economic status, and emigration trauma, foreign-born Asian American students report significantly greater levels of both intrapersonal and interpersonal distress than U.S.-born Asian Americans. Differences were found even though the foreign-born students in this study had lived in the United Stated for relatively long periods of time and were highly acculturated. Abe and Zane (1990) conclude that Asian immigrants are at a greater risk for mental health problems than are U.S.-born Asian American students regardless of acculturation level.

The major strengths of this study come from the authors' diligence in attempting to control possible confounding factors. In addition to controlling for the two confounds targeted by the research design, response style, and personality style, the authors also controll for social economic status level and the immigration experiences of Southeast Asian students, when the data indicated that either may have confounding effects on the results.

Like many other studies, this research also suffers from the limitation of sample selection. Findings may suffer from relatively small sample groups (29 U.S. born Asian Americans, 46 foreign-born Asian Americans). In addition there were significantly more women (20) than men (9) in the U.S.-born group.

Ethnicity and language match. Increased numbers of Asian Americans mental health providers have allowed researchers to study the effects of ethnicity and language match between counselors and their clients. One such study by Gim et al. (1991) examine this effect in the counseling center setting. Others study it on a larger community scale (Lin, 1994; Flaskerud & Liu, 1991; Sue et. al., 1991; Ying & Hu, 1994).

In their study Gim et al. (1991) state, "Often there is a direct relationship between the number of Asian American staff members and the number of Asian American clients."(p. 57) The authors propose that Asian Americans may not perceive non-Asian Americans as credible sources of help. They find that Asian American students, regardless of acculturation level, rate Caucasian American counselors as significantly less credible than Asian American counselors. The researchers conclude that ethnically similar counselors are perceived as being more credible and culturally competent than counselors who are ethnically dissimilar.

When cultural sensitivity was factored in, low acculturated subjects consistently gave the lowest rating to culturally-insensitive Caucasian counselors. Overall, counselors of similar ethnicity or language are perceived as more credible sources of help. Culturally sensitive counselors are view more

positively than culturally-insensitive ones. The authors suggest that all counselors can enhance their perceived competence and credibility among Asian American clients by acknowledging the role that culture plays in clients' problems.

Gim et al. (1991) are to be complemented for initiating research into this important subject. Overall the study is designed and conducted with a high level of quality. Beside the usual limitations of sample selection and size, the major weakness of this study lies in the use of audio taped counseling sessions as the stimulus material. It is unknown whether listening to an audio tape has the same effect on the subjects as experiencing an actual counseling session.

General Population

When studying Asian American utilization of counseling center services, it is important to also take a look at the greater societal usage patterns from which these students come. The following sections will look at utilization research conducted on both local and national levels.

Utilization patterns. In a review of overall national patterns for the utilization of mental health services by Asian Americans, Matsuoka et al. (1997) report that Asian Americans are three times less likely than Euro Americans to use available mental health services. Zhang et al. (1998) believes that under-utilization is due to the lack of cultural sensitivity in most mainstream mental health facilities in treating Asian Americans.

Matsuoka et al. (1997) conducted an archival study of 1986 survey data gathered by the National Institute of Mental Health. After carefully analyzing

the records, the authors conclude that at the national level, for all types of services across all types of facilities, Asian Americans are three times less likely than Euro Americans to make use of mental health services. Under-utilization was evident nationally, as well as in every state with a major or moderate Asian American population.

Zhang et al. (1998) reach similar conclusions when they sampled Asian Americans in Los Angeles County. The researchers find that Asian Americans visit mental health services significantly less frequently than Euro Americans. Asian Americans were less likely than do Euro Americans to mention their mental health problems to anyone: whether friends, relatives, psychologists, mental health specialists, or physicians.

Contrary to earlier findings (Lippincott & Mierzwa, 1995), this study did not find any evidence to support the hypothesis that Asian Americans visited physicians for physical health problems as an alternative to dealing with mental health struggles. In general Asian Americans report fewer somatic symptoms than Euro Americans. The number of somatic symptoms was positively correlated with disclosure of mental health struggles. For both groups, an increased number of somatic symptoms was the best predictor of willingness to disclose about mental health problems. The authors conclude that Asian Americans' under-utilization of mental health services was more likely due to lack of appropriate sources of help than to tendencies to somaticize problems.

Ethnic/ language match. As mentioned earlier, increased numbers of Asian American mental health providers and the establishment of ethnically-

specific programs, has allowed research into the effects of ethnic and language match between counselors and clients. Ying and Hu (1994) report that ethnic match increased utilization rates in all but one Asian American group. Flaskerud and Liu (1991) find that ethnic match increased the number of counseling sessions attended. Sue et. al. (1991) state that ethnic or language match decreased drop out rates and increase both number of sessions as well as therapeutic outcome. Lin (1994), discover that, when matched for language and ethnicity, Chinese American clients remained in therapy for about the same length of time as did the general American population.

Ying and Hu (1994) examine utilization and outcome of mental health services among various Asian American groups in Los Angeles County through an Archival study of Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health records. For most groups, ethnic match resulted in greater service use. An increased number of sessions for ethnically matched clients resulted in superior therapeutic outcomes as measured by the Global Assessment Scale.

Southeast Asians are the exception to these findings. As a group they are over-represented in the system relative to their population. They demonstrate greater mental health needs and do not seem to benefit from ethnically matched helpers. The authors attributed the over-representation and higher psychological needs to severe war and migration traumas. Compared to other Asian American groups, Southeast Asians also suffer from anxiety disorders at a higher proportion.

The absence of significant positive effects of ethnicity match among Southeast Asians is confounded by the lack of Southeast Asian professional therapists and the over-representation of paraprofessional counselors in the system. Thus, findings may be due to the lower therapeutic skill levels of providers and not the insignificance of ethnicity match.

Flaskerud and Liu (1991) also looked at Los Angeles County records on the effects of ethnic and/or language match between therapists and clients. When the client and the therapist share either a common language or a common ethnic origin, the number of therapy sessions significantly increase, and drop-out rates decrease. Ethnicity match is important to utilization regardless of language match. The authors conclude that in order to enhance utilization, mental health facilities should employ therapists of the same ethnicity and language as the clients in the targeted community. They urge universities and professional schools to make concerted efforts in training more ethnically diverse therapists to better service these populations.

Sue et. al. (1991) reach similar conclusions. They find ethnic match important in decreasing premature terminations. Among Asian Americans whose primary language was not English, ethnic and language match was vital for decreasing drop-out rates, improving length of treatment, and positive therapeutic outcome. Sue et. al. (1991) find that for Asian Americans, either ethnicity or language match increased the number of therapy sessions.

Similar to other studies, this study finds that Asian Americans significantly under-utilize mental health services. An unexpected finding was

that, when compared to other groups, (Euro Americans, Latinos, and African Americans) Asian Americans who sought therapy actually attended the most therapy sessions. The authors suggest that, although Asian Americans avoid using services, those who enter the mental health system stay in treatment longer and have better outcomes than all others. The authors strongly advise the recruitment of bilingual and bicultural mental health workers to improve utilization rates and treatment outcomes for Asian Americans.

Lin (1994), looked specifically at utilization rates by Chinese Americans when matched for ethnicity and language with their counselors. He found that Chinese American clients stay in psychotherapy for a length of time comparable to the general public when ethnic and language matched therapists are provided. The results of this study indicate that traditional western psychotherapy with a degree of modification was acceptable to Chinese Americans when it is provided by ethnic and language matched therapists. The findings challenge the popular notion that psychotherapy is not acceptable to Chinese Americans. The author suggests that once Chinese Americans enter treatment, their acceptance or rejection of therapy depend largely on the quality of the therapist. In summary, it is necessary that psychotherapy be properly used with Asian American groups by well-trained ethnic and language matched therapists before conclusions regarding effectiveness can be reached.

Ethnic specific programs. A natural outgrowth of providing ethnic and language matched therapists is the establishment of ethnic specific services and

programs. Takeuchi et. al. (1995) examine return rates and outcomes from ethnic specific mental health programs in Los Angeles.

Takeuchi et al. (1995) find that Asian Americans who enter ethnic specific programs are nearly 15 times more likely than Asian Americans in mainstream programs to return after the first session. Attendance of ethnic specific programs result in significantly greater number of treatment sessions. A surprise finding is that ethnic specific programs are associated with higher return rates whether or not clients were ethnically matched with their therapists. The authors believe these positive effects are associated with certain characteristics of ethnic programs, such as the presence of bilingual and bicultural staff, provision of an ethnic atmosphere, announcements and other communications written in ethnic languages, treatment conducted in a more culturally sensitive manner, and the use of culturally appropriate interpersonal styles. Lin (1994) concludes that given the increasingly multiethnic nature of our society, all mental health services will need to become more responsive to the cultural need of the population at large. An effective way to meet this goal is through the establishment of ethnic specific programs, which would provide services to populations whose needs remain unmet by current mental health resources.

Conclusion

After nearly 20 years of research into Asian American utilization patterns, new insights have emerged. As a whole, Asian Americans are still greatly

under-utilizing counseling services, on both the campus and national levels (Lee & Mixson, 1995; Matsuoka et al., 1997; Sue et al., 1991). This phenomenon is not a reflection of lower mental health needs. Rather, it is a result of the lack of competent, culturally-sensitive services (Lee & Mixson, 1995; Zhang et al., 1998). The availability of quality clinicians and services has been shown to improve utilization rates in many settings (Akutsu et al., 1990; Lee & Mixson, 1995; Lin, 1994).

When Asian Americans do seek therapeutic assistance, the presenting problems are often different from those of Euro Americans. In addition to relational struggles, academic and vocational concerns are frequently mentioned (Solberg et al., 1994; Tracey et al., 1986).

Little evidence has been found to support the notion that low utilization is due to somatization tendencies (Narikiyo & Kameoka, 1992). On the contrary, greater number of somatic symptoms was a good predictor of help-seeking behaviors (Zhang et al., 1998).

A surprise finding of this literature review is that acculturation level is not a reliable predictor of utilization (Atkinson et al., 1990; Gim et al., 1990). Asian American under-utilization of mental health services do not seem to be a function of acculturation level. Some studies find a positive relationship between acculturation level and utilization (Tata & Leong, 1994), other studies find the opposite (Atkinson et al., 1990; Gim et al., 1990).

The most effective influences on increasing utilization rates are the presence of ethnically or linguistically matched therapists (Flaskerud & Liu, 1991;

Gim et al., 1991; Sue et al., 1991; Ying & Hu, 1994), and the establishment of ethnic specific services (Takeuchi et al., 1995).

As university counseling centers prepare to head into the next millennia, the needs of Asian American students can no longer be ignored. Asian Americans are rapidly becoming the majority group in institutions of higher learning in some areas of the United States. Under-utilization by Asian American students will likely become an issue of viability for counseling centers and other mental health services. Recruitment of ethnically diverse staff is vital to ensure that university counseling centers continue to effectively serve the needs of all students. In addition, culture-specific programming will establish counseling center services as a viable source of assistance for Asian American students. Responsibility for providing services to this population should not rest solely upon a few individuals. Ultimately, this task requires the cooperation and commitment of the entire counseling staff, as well as the support of campus administrations.

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